

WISCONSIN MAIN STREET PROGRAM

The Wisconsin Main Street Program is a comprehensive revitalization program designed to promote the historic and economic redevelopment of traditional business districts in Wisconsin. The Main Street Program was established in 1987 to encourage and support the revitalization of downtowns in Wisconsin communities. The Department of Commerce selects communities to join the program on regular bases. These communities receive technical support and training needed to restore their Main Streets to centers of community activity and commerce.

The results in Wisconsin have been impressive. Wisconsin Main Street Programs have brought significant numbers of new businesses and jobs to their respective downtowns. Facade improvements and building rehabilitation projects have upgraded the image of Main Street. Promotional activities bring the community together in a positive way.

THE FOUR-POINT APPROACH

In 1980, the National Trust for Historic Preservation established the National Main Street Center to assist nationwide downtown revitalization efforts. The Wisconsin Main Street Program is based on the Trust's philosophy, which advocates restoration of the historic character of downtown while pursuing traditional development strategies such as *marketing*, business recruitment and retention, real estate development, market analysis, and public improvements.

There are no quick fixes for declining downtowns, but success can be realized through the comprehensive and incremental approach of the Main Street Program.

Four elements combine to create this well balanced program:

Organization involves building a Main Street framework that is well represented by civic groups, merchants, bankers, citizens, public officials, and chambers of commerce. Everyone must work together to renew downtown. A strong organization provides the stability to build and maintain a long-term effort.

Design enhances the attractiveness of the business district. Historic building rehabilitations, street and alley clean-ups, colorful banners, landscaping and lighting all improve the physical image of the downtown as a quality place to shop, work, walk, invest in, and live. Design improvements result in a reinvestment of private and public dollars into the downtown.

Economic Restructuring involves analyzing current market forces to develop long-term solutions. Recruiting new businesses, creatively converting unused space for new uses, and sharpening the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional merchants are examples of economic restructuring activities.

Promotion creates excitement downtown. Street festivals, parades, retail events, and image development campaigns are some of the ways Main Street encourages consumer traffic in the downtown. Promotion involves marketing an enticing image to shoppers, investors, and visitors.

SERVICES AVAILABLE TO COMMUNITIES

Communities selected to participate in the Wisconsin Main Street Program receive five years of technical assistance, including:

- Volunteer and program manager training;
- Advanced training on specific downtown issues, such as marketing, business recruitment, volunteer development, and historic preservation;
- On-site visits to help each community develop its strengths and plan for success;
- On-site design consultations;
- On-site small business consultations;
- Telephone assistance;
- Materials such as manuals and slide programs; and
- Linkages to other Main Street communities.

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Successful applicants are committed to the following key principles:

- Procurement of stable, local funding;
- Establishment of a volunteer board of directors;
- Procurement of stable, local funding;
- Development of public/private partnerships;
- Commitment to hire a program manager;
- Commitment to the four-point approach;
- Establishment of a well-defined commercial district;
- Commitment to historic preservation; and
- Willingness to work and succeed over time.

For more information regarding the Main Street program or assistance available to communities that are not member Main Street communities, contact the Bureau of Downtown & Community Revitalization at:

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